

Alternative Sources of Social Value: Status and Inclusion Independently Predict Self-Esteem

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1. Why do we possess self-esteem?

An evolutionary approach to self-esteem

Self-esteem or how we feel about ourselves is one of the most popular topics in psychology.

But what evolutionary function does it serve?

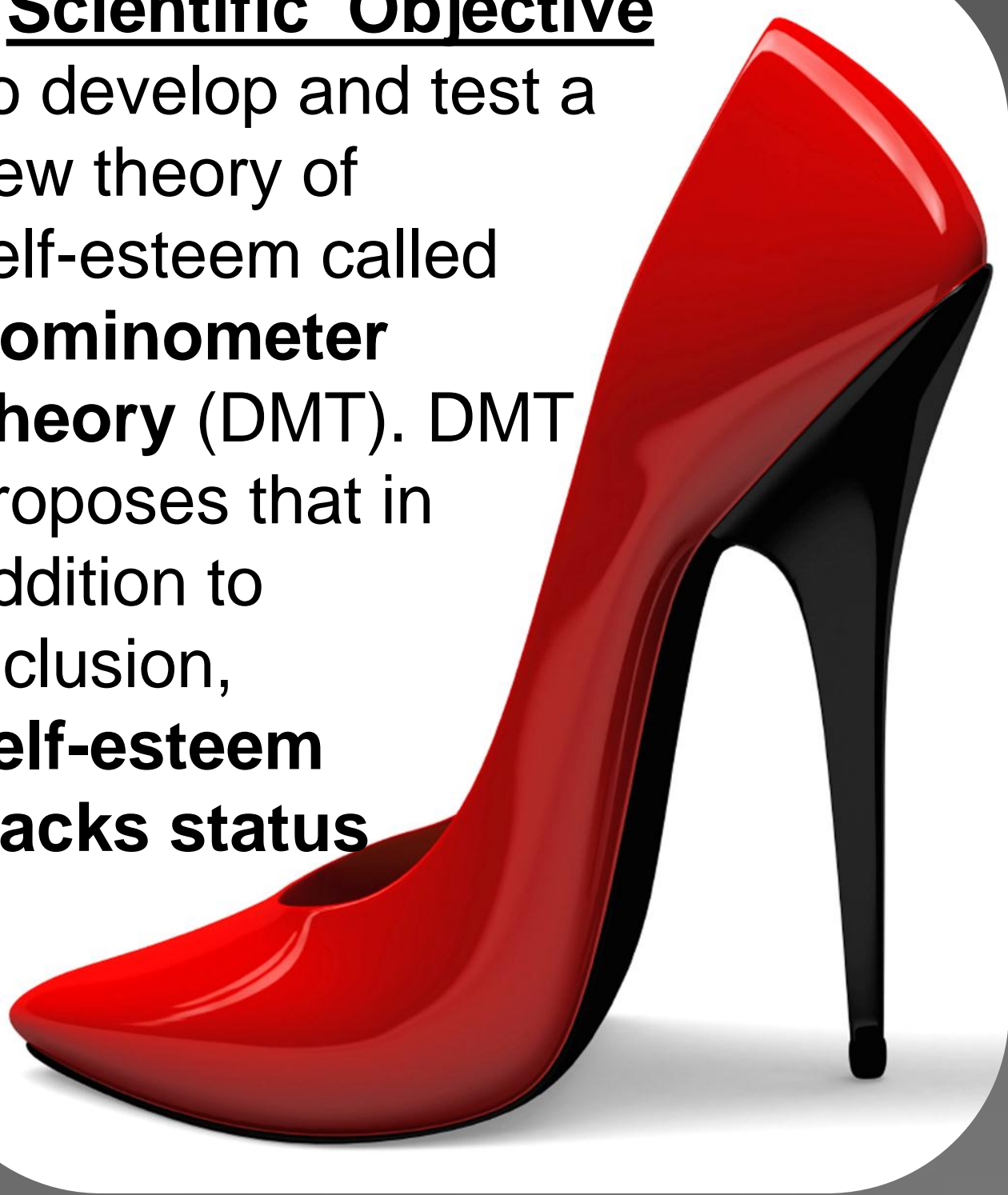
One theory, namely, **Sociometer Theory** (SMT) (Leary, 1999) proposes that because inclusion in social groups was crucial to our ancestors' survival, self-esteem evolved to track our level of inclusion in social groups, and raise this level of inclusion when it got too low.

In support of SMT, being included raises self-esteem and being excluded lowers it (e.g. Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001).

2. Dominometer Theory

Scientific Objective

To develop and test a new theory of self-esteem called **Dominometer Theory** (DMT). DMT proposes that in addition to inclusion, **self-esteem tracks status**



DMT proposes that people developed self-esteem in order to track their position in the social hierarchy, and to motivate behaviour suitable to their social role.

Most primate and human societies possess **social hierarchies** and **competition**:

Apes fight for status



Human beings desire and pursue status



3. Hypotheses

1. Higher status predicts higher self-esteem.
2. Higher self-esteem predicts more assertive behaviour.
3. Manipulating status will affect self-esteem: raising/lowering status will raise/lower self-esteem, respectively.
4. The links between status and self-esteem, and self-esteem and assertive behaviour, will be maintained after controlling for inclusion and agreeable behaviour, respectively, thus empirically distinguishing DMT from SMT.

4. Method & Results

Study 1

Correlation Study (Conducted Online)

Participants:
N=853
(424 ♂, 429 ♀;
Mean Age=30.47;
From Europe, USA).

Method:
Assessed correlations between perceived status, perceived inclusion, and self-esteem.

Measures:
Self-esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), Perceived Status & Perceived Inclusion (adapted from Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010) questionnaires.

Partial Correlations:
(controlling for Perceived Status and Perceived Inclusion, respectively)

Self-esteem	
Perceived Status	.32**
Perceived Inclusion	.31**

*p < .05; **p < .001.

Perceived status and self-esteem were positively correlated, even after controlling for perceived inclusion

Study 2

Correlation Study (Conducted Online)

Participants:
N=620
(235 ♂, 385 ♀;
Mean Age=34.59;
From Europe, USA).

Method:
Assessed correlation between self-esteem, assertive behaviour and agreeable behaviour.

Measures:
Self-esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), & Social Behaviour (SBI; Moskowitz, 1994) questionnaires.

Partial Correlations:
(controlling for self-reported Assertive Behaviour and Agreeable Behaviour, respectively)

Self-esteem	
Assertive Behaviour	.49**
Agreeable Behaviour	.31**

*p < .05; **p < .001.

Self-esteem and assertive behaviour were positively correlated, even after controlling for agreeable behaviour

Study 3

Experimental Study (Conducted at University of Southampton, UK)

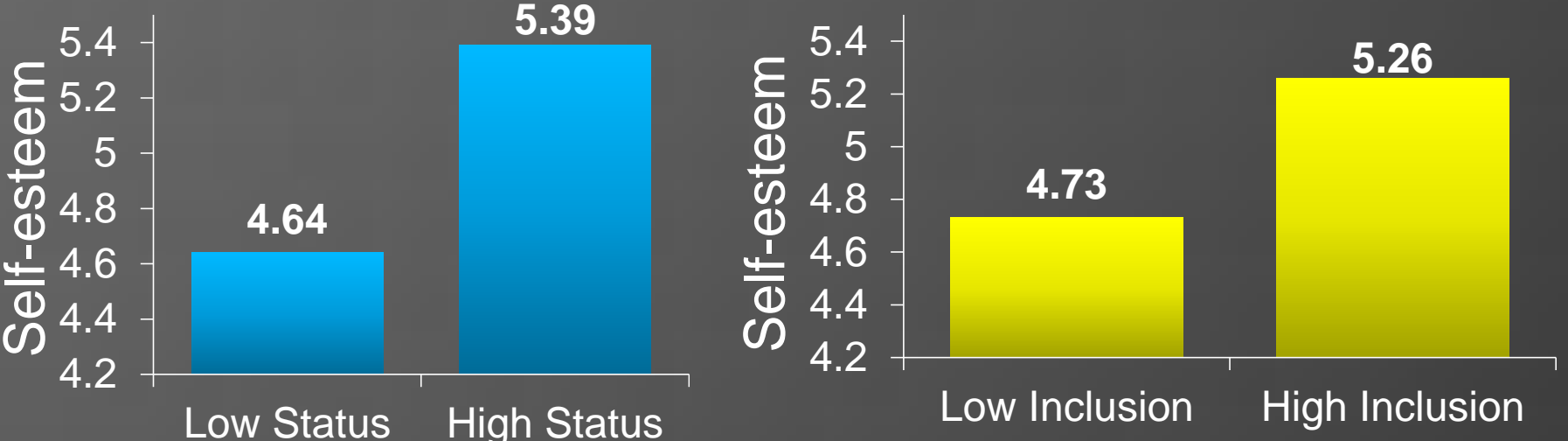
Participants:
110 undergraduates
(19 ♂, 91 ♀;
Mean Age=19.81;
From UoS).

Method:
Participants completed a fake test & received false feedback indicating they had either **high or low potential to achieve status**, and either **high or low potential to be included**, in life. Their self-esteem was measured in response to this feedback.

Analysis of Variance (2X2 ANOVA):
(IVs: Status & Inclusion, DV: Self-esteem)

Self-esteem	
Status	F(1,106) = 8.60**
Inclusion	F(1,106) = 3.86*

*p < .05; **p < .001.



Raising/lowering anticipated status and inclusion, raised/lowered self-esteem, respectively

5. Conclusions and Implications

1. This research establishes positive correlations between status and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and assertive behaviour, showing that these links hold even when controlling for inclusion and agreeable behaviour.
2. It establishes, for the first time, a **causal link** between status and self-esteem: changes in status, even controlling for inclusion, cause changes in self-esteem.
3. Future research should examine the second part of the causal chain, that changes in self-esteem **cause** changes in assertive behaviour, and that self-esteem **mediates** the link between status and assertive behaviour.

Impact
Experimentally establishes causality for the first time
Status → Self-esteem

6. References

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4. Moskowitz, D. S. (1994). Cross-situational generality and the interpersonal circumplex. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(5), 921-933.